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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000392

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: SALEH ASSERTS CONTROL OVER PARLIAMENT: LEADERSHIP
RE-ELECTED, REFORMERS WITHDRAW FROM RACE

REF: SANAA 330

Classified By: AMBASSADOR THOMAS C. KRAJESKI, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) After months of maneuvering by reform-minded parliamentarians, President Saleh drew a line in the sand on February 15 and demanded loyalty. MPs re-elected Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar to a two-year term as Speaker with 240 yes votes and 12 blank ballots, and re-elected all three Deputy Speakers as well. Al-Ahmar's victory came as no surprise, after the ruling GPC party made clear its intention to follow the President's instructions and re-elect the sheikh, head of the opposition Islah party (reftel). Sheikh Abdullah did not return from Saudi Arabia, where he has been receiving medical treatment, for the election. Some sources reported that he sent a communique that he was willing to stand for election, which some regarded as a small nod to the democratic process.

¶2. (C) More surprising was the President's hard line for the rest of the four-member Presidium (NOTE: The Presidium has broad powers in deciding which laws are debated and what demands are made of the executive. END NOTE). The GPC caucus had already agreed to support Yahya al-Rai, widely regarded as the President's man. In a party vote, however, GPC members chose Sakhar al-Wajee and Mohammed al-Shadadi, both regarded as reformers in favor of a more independent legislature. Shadadi withdrew his candidacy under intense pressure from the executive, and dozens of GPC parliamentarians abandoned Wajee when the vote reached the floor. As a result, Parliament re-elected Jafar Basale and Abdul Wahab Mahmood, both of whom have proved pliant to the demands of the executive.

¶3. (C) Comment: This is a step backwards for Parliament, which showed some backbone in recent months by passing new bylaws and challenging ROYG ministers on issues of corruption. In the end, however, internal elections demonstrated the limits of the legislature's independence. MPs belonging to the President's ruling GPC party were forced to tow the line and do Saleh's bidding. In fact, the President showed so little respect for Parliament or his party at all, allowing them to go through a democratic process only to override it at the last minute. The experience is likely to leave a bad taste in the mouths of many MPs and could foment future parliamentary rebellions, but for now it remains clear who is in charge. End Comment Krajeski